

**Remarks**

Claims 1-25, 27, 30, 34-36, 41-43, 45, 47-58, 63-68, 73-75, 84, 86, 87, and 90-97 are pending in the present application. Claims 26, 28, 29, 31-33, 37-40, 44, 46, 59-62, 69-72, 76-83, 85, 88, 89, 98, and 99 have been canceled without prejudice. Claim 91 has been amended.

The Applicants respectfully contend that, for fee calculation purposes, the application contains (99 original claims - 33 canceled claims =) 66 total claims and 30 independent claims.

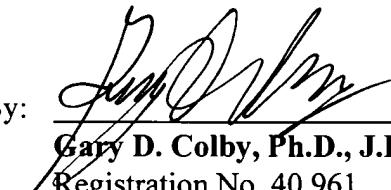
A favorable office action on the merits is respectfully requested at the earliest possible time.

Respectfully submitted,

**CARLO M. CROCE, ET AL.**

February 25, 2000  
(Date)

By:

  
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